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The Effect of Veteran Student Support Services on Veteran Students' Academic Achievement

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Walden University
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Abstract

The Effect of Veteran Student Support Services on Veteran Students' Academic

Achievement

by

Justin Zickar

MBA, Capitol Technology University, 2016

BA, The Pennsylvania State University, 2011

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

August 2019

Abstract

Since the introduction of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, veteran student support services have expanded in higher education in response to the growing veteran student population and to improve the academic achievement of veteran students. The problem addressed in this study was a lack of knowledge regarding the effect of veteran students' participation in veteran student support services on veterans' academic achievement at selected colleges in Maryland. Using a theoretical foundation of Pascarella and Terenzini's within-college framework, the research question examined the effects of veteran students' participation in veteran student support services on their academic achievement as measured by their grade point average. A quantitative causal-comparative design and a veteran student sample of $N = 128$ were used to determine if veteran student support services affect veteran students' academic achievement. Archival data from 2 higher education institutions in the state of Maryland were collected for this study. Results of a one-way ANOVA showed no significant difference in the academic achievement of veteran students who participated and who did not participate in veteran student support services. The findings from this study may lead to positive social change for veteran students in the state of Maryland and across the United States by providing an empirical basis for the need for improvements of veteran students support services in higher education.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife and children. I would also like to thank my family, who have always supported me.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my chair, Dr. Markus Berndt, for his tremendous guidance and incredible support through this process. In addition, I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Thomas Hadley and Dr. Joanna Karet, who assisted with valued insight and review as well. I would also like to thank my colleagues and leaders, who assisted my growth as a scholar and practitioner in higher education, and my family and friends, who helped lend their support and perspective throughout my journey. And lastly, my wife, who, without her understanding, guidance, and patience, this would not be possible.

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Section 1: The Problem

In the United States, the Post-9/11 GI Bill has significantly increased the opportunities of veterans pursuing academics at higher education institutions. At higher education intuitions across the country, veteran student support services offer the opportunity for students to gain academic support while completing their studies at higher education institutions (Jones, 2017). Veteran student support services can include, but are not limited to, services that provide direct academic guidance, such as peer-review and revision, tutoring, and study support (Murillo, 2017). Participation in veteran student support services includes the use to influence assigned academic course-related work for academic achievements, such as the increase in a student's grade, as measured by grade point average (GPA).

The Local Problem

The problem in this study was a lack of knowledge regarding the effect of veteran students' participation in veteran student support services on their academic achievement at selected colleges in Maryland. Specifically, in Maryland, there is a lack of understanding of the veteran student support services needed since higher education institutions are not required but voluntarily can promise to commit to instituting practices to support veterans as they pursue their postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs Associate Liaison, personal communication, January 7, 2017). While veteran student support services offer this student population the opportunity for assistance, the effect of these services on the academic achievement of veteran students is unknown (Office of Military & Federal Affairs Management Associate, personal

communication, May 8, 2017). The purpose of veteran student support services is to provide former members of the U.S. armed forces with campus services that positively promote academic and administrative assistance to the student experience (Southwell, Whiteman, MacDermid Wadsworth, & Barry, 2018). There is evidence that veteran student support services have positive effects on veterans pursuing their education at a higher education institution (Durosko, 2017). Likewise, due to a lack of understanding of veteran student needs, there is inconclusive evidence to support the positive effects of veteran benefits on their academic achievement (Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topf, 2018). Contradictory conclusions surrounding the effect of veteran students' participation in veteran student support services on their academic achievement create barriers for higher education institutions serving this student population. Specifically, in the state of Maryland, the veteran student population is the largest amongst colleges and universities across the United States (Department of Veteran Affairs, 2018c). Locally, colleges in Maryland can partner with the Department of Veteran affairs and commit to practices that assist with veterans' student support while they pursue their postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs Associate Liasion, personal communication, January 7, 2017). However, institutions that have implemented such support services for veteran students have not reported any increase or decrease in veteran student academic achievement (Dillard & Yu, 2016). Meanwhile, veteran student support services, that is, services that are going beyond the regular support services available to all students, offer this student population the opportunity for assistance, but the effect of these services on

the academic achievement of veteran students is unknown (Office of Military & Federal Affairs Management Associate, personal communication, May 8, 2017; Newton, 2017).

Moreover, the veteran student population has increased since the introduction of the Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Specifically, this has allowed prior U.S. armed forces members with at least 90 days of active duty service after September 10, 2001 to receive 36 months of educational benefits at the 100% level (Department of Veteran Affairs, 2018a). Post-9/11 veterans are defined as individuals who have served in the U.S. armed forces after September 10, 2001 (Department of Veteran Affairs, 2018b). In 2016, over 4.2 million Post-9/11 veterans had served and were eligible for veteran educational benefits (Department of Veteran Affairs, 2018b). The Department of Veteran Affairs (2018c) reported that 1,000,089 veterans received education benefits in 2016 as a result of their service. However, by 2021, the Department of Veteran Affairs (2018c) expects the Post-9/11 veteran population to increase by 924,000 veterans, nearly 22%. With an increase amongst the Post-9/11 veteran population, the use of educational benefits is expected to rise 13%, an increase of 130,012 veterans. Southwell et al. (2018) exhibited that veteran student support services being readily available to the veteran student population fostered increased awareness and communication among students and faculty members.

In contrast to transitional services, veteran student support services offer students support while pursuing their education. Alshuler and Yarab (2018) recommended offering peer support and counseling to assist veteran students during their transition and continuing education. Also, Mastrocola and Flynn (2017) identified that veteran students

battle suicide, substance abuse, homelessness, crime, and other mental issues as they pursue their education. Providing veteran student support services, such as peer support, assists veterans with a better understanding of these issues and eliminates academic barriers (Mastrocola & Flynn, 2017). Despite the positive effects of veteran student support services on veterans' academic achievement, many institutions do not have these services readily available or have an incomplete understanding of the services needed. Lange, Sears, and Osborne (2016) identified that support services are not only needed, but institutions were unaware of the practical and useful information for student veterans pursuing their education. DiRamio (2018) recognized that the administrative and academic guidelines that make up institutional policy provide a lack of guidance surrounding support services, thus creating barriers in a veteran's academic achievement. Morris, Gibbes, and Jennings (2018) examined trends showing that veteran students needed individualized support, including academic and administrative resources, to assist with their transition and success. Murillo (2017) believed that the individualized support needed by the veteran student population must be provided by substantive resources, including skilled and qualified staff, with an understanding of veterans' perspectives. Many colleges and universities across the United States are pushing to implement veteran student support services to assist this student population. While some researchers have suggested positive effects regarding veteran students' transition to higher education, other studies lack evidence that participation in veteran student support services has positive effects on the academic achievement of veteran students. There is no current study that details evidence of an increase in academic achievement as a result of participation in

veteran student support services. Hence, the purpose of this study was to explore the effect participation in veteran student support services has on veteran students' academic achievement.

Rationale

The Post-9/11 GI Bill has caused an increase in the enrollment of veteran students at higher education institutions in the United States. Subsequently, the increase in veteran students has increased the number of veteran student support services needed to assist with their educational pursuit. The Department of Education (2018) recommended that institutions provide academic, career, and financial advice to assist with overcoming barriers to their education. These support services promote well-being and success while creating confidence as U.S. armed forces pursue their postsecondary education as civilians (Department of Education, 2018). An absence of veteran student support services at higher education institutions has opposing effects on veteran students, including academic achievement (O'Connor et al., 2017). While enhancing the support services available to veteran students allows for increased support, there is no evidence on the effects of support services on an increase or decrease in academic achievement.

In Maryland, the lack of understanding surrounding needed veteran student support services can be seen locally, as colleges are not required but voluntarily can promise to commit to instituting practices that assist with supporting veterans as they pursue their postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs Associate Liaison, personal communication, January 7, 2017). Administrators of higher education institutions who have implemented the Department of Veteran Affairs recommendations,

such as support services and strategies in resources, have seen no evidence of change in veteran student academic achievement (Dillard & Yu, 2016). Therefore, while veteran student support services offer this student population the opportunity for assistance, the effect of these services on the academic achievement of veteran students is unknown (Office of Military & Federal Affairs Management Associate, personal communication, May 8, 2017).

Implementation of veteran student support services offers prior military students the option to explore transition issues and integrate into higher education (Brawner, Mobley, Lord, Camacho, & Main, 2017). Given the ability for prior military to integrate into higher education institutions, colleges and universities have the opportunity to add veteran student support services to better understand veteran-related issues and outcomes (Southwell et al., 2018); however, institutional leadership must also understand what enables veteran student academic achievement, such as GPA, to develop the appropriate services for support (Hammond, 2017a). Due to the lack of knowledge surrounding the effect of veteran student support services on the academic achievement of veteran students at higher education institutions, a gap in practice can be seen.

The goal of this study was to investigate the effect veteran students' participation in veteran student support services has on veteran students' academic achievement. The results of this study could increase the overall understanding of the effects of veteran student support services on veteran students' academic achievement. This focused research on veteran services and academic achievement may assist in helping higher

education administrators, faculty, and staff with what kind of veteran student support services to implement for their veteran student populations.

Definition of Terms

These are the key terms that used in this study.

Grade point average (GPA): Average of all grade points earned over the entirety of a student's degree program (Walden University, 2018). It is calculated on a semester or quarterly basis and is reported on students' transcripts.

Veteran student: An individual who served in the United States Armed Forces and was discharged honorably (Department of Veteran Affairs, 2018a).

Veteran student support services: Academic and administrative services designed and implemented to assist veteran students with support upon entering and completing their education at higher education institutions (Dillard & Yu, 2016).

Significance of the Study

In this project study, I aimed to identify the effect of participation in veteran student support services on veteran student academic achievement at the higher education institutional level. These possible insights can assist in understanding what specific services better prepare and support veteran students in achieving success throughout their academic studies. Higher education leaders then can better serve this population of students by adding, removing, or modifying existing support programs to cultivate academic success (Vacchi, Hammond, & Diamond, 2017). Therefore, understanding the components of the resources offered or not offered at the institutional level allows for an understanding of outcomes for improving academic achievement (Murillo, 2017). My

research can assist in adding support to a student population who encounters additional challenges other than academic challenges when pursuing educational opportunities (see DiRamio, 2018; Wenger et al., 2017) and can lead to understanding how learning environments, academic programs, and resources can be designed to improve veteran student academic achievement (Morris et al., 2018).

There is a growing consensus that gaining more knowledge about the effect of participation in veteran student support services on veteran student academic achievement can benefit this student population in providing information on developing targeted support in the future. Locally, I reviewed the current services at two institutions within the state of Maryland. By providing the results to administrators, my study may guide that specialized support to assist veteran students and can positively affect their academic achievement (project deliverable). This positive social change can empower current and future veteran students to continue and complete their education after serving in the military.

Research Questions

The potential effects regarding the role veteran student support services plays in increasing academic achievement is developing, but more studies are needed. Currently, there are few studies that link veteran student support services to an increase in academic achievement in veteran students. Moreover, there are studies that address veteran student support services in general but provide insufficient information targeting the effects of veteran student support service on their academic achievement.

Given the unknown effects of veteran student support services on the academic achievement of veteran students, including a lack of understanding surrounding the veteran student support services needed (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs Associate Liaison, personal communication, January 7, 2017) and the veteran student support services that offer the opportunity for assistance (Office of Military & Federal Affairs Management Associate, personal communication, May 8, 2017), the topic needs to be explored further. There is a noticeable gap in the literature concerning veteran students and the effects participation in veteran student support services have on their academic achievement. This study is intended to increase the body of literature on the effects of veteran student supports services on veteran students' academic achievement by answering the following research question:

Research Question (RQ)1: What is the effect of participation in veteran student support services on veteran student academic achievement?

$H_0 1$: There is no statistically significant difference in the academic achievement of veteran students who participated in veteran student support services compared to students who did not participate in veteran student support services.

$H_a 1$: There is a statistically significant difference in the academic achievement of veteran students who participated in veteran student support services compared to students who did not participate in veteran student support services.

Review of the Literature

Theoretical Foundation

I adopted the within-college effects framework as the theoretical framework for this study (see Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The within-college effects framework identifies student experiences that influence and determine student success while students are pursuing an academic degree program at an institution of higher education. Specifically, the model offers institutions the ability to investigate the environments they create to successfully impact student success. The theoretical framework established by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) was used to assist in understanding the effects of veteran student support programs and academic achievement. The theoretical model incorporates student experiences and engagement about the effect on students' academic and personal development (Astin, 1993; Kuh, 2009). Additionally, the theoretical model was used to offer the opportunity to understand the foundation of student success from the institutional level instead of individual characteristics. The college impact models focus on student success as it relates to the experiences that students have while enrolled at their respective institutions and elements of such.

Using the college impact model of within-college effects as its framework, the focus of this study was based on the institutional factor of the implementation of veteran student support services and the ability of the services to positively or negatively impact academic achievement. Specifically, the framework by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) was used to examine whether veteran student support services significantly impact the academic achievement of veteran students. By investigating participation in veteran

student support services, it was possible to determine the effects on the academic

achievement of veteran students.

Review of the Broader Problem

In this section, the research and literature review are summarized to relate to the

existence of veteran student support services and the potential impact on academic

achievement. The literature reviewed was accessed through the Walden University

library system. Specifically, Walden University's e-library system provided access to

electronic databases, including Education Source and Education Resource Information

Center (ERIC). Key search terms included but were not limited to *veterans' academic*

achievement, veteran student support services, academic achievement and veteran

student support services, and *veterans and higher education.*

Studies have been conducted to determine if the existence of veteran student

support services are needed to assist the veteran student population in their transition to

higher education institutions (DiRamio, 2018; Evans, Pellegrino, & Hoggan, 2015;

Hammond, 2017b; Heineman, 2015; Jones, 2017; Morris et al., 2018; Murillo, 2017;

Vacchi et al., 2017; Wenger et al., 2017). DiRamio (2018) discovered that campus

policies and academic opportunities to assist veteran students in assimilating with campus

and college life are nonexistent. Evans et al. (2015) indicated that planning,

implementation, and sustainability in individualized support could assist veteran students.

According to Jones (2017), veterans' immediate environment must be reinforced by the

existence of specific services if the veteran student population can successfully transition

from the military, let alone increase academic achievement. Hammond (2017b) and

Heineman (2015) suggested allocating resources and using support services to minimize obstacles for veteran students' education. Also, Morris et al. (2018) examined trends that concluded veteran students needed direction, as well as academic support and resources through their degree programs to assist with academic success and completion. Murillo (2017) examined the responses of veteran students pursuing their education. He observed patterns that veteran students needed substantive resources from skilled, qualified staff to assist with academic success (Murillo, 2017). Vacchi et al. (2017) provided information that it is necessary for institutions to understand how and what to implement to support veteran student success and improve the support services to this population. Further, Wenger et al. (2017) concluded that through understanding that while veteran educational benefits, such as the Post 9-11 G.I. Bill, assist a veteran student financially, it does not provide academic support to guide the student to success.

While the existence of veteran student support services is not mandated or required by higher education institutions, the literature I reviewed identified that these services provide academic and administrative assistance to veteran students. This supports the Department of Veteran Affairs' recommendation that higher education institutions in Maryland institute practices that assist in supporting veterans' postsecondary education. Meanwhile, this literature does not provide evidence that academic achievement is impacted by veteran student support services.

Veteran Support Services and Academic Achievement

Veteran student support services offer students the opportunity to receive assistance for administrative and academic purposes, which may or may not have an

impact on the students' academic achievement. There are several studies that provide information relating to veteran student support services being needed for veteran students but do not specify whether these services increase or decrease academic achievement (Aikens, Golub, & Bennett, 2015; Alshuler & Yarab, 2018; Durosko, 2017; Hammond, 2016a; Kirchner, 2015; Lange et al., 2018; LeMire, 2017; Leslie & Koblinsky, 2017; Lim, Interiano, Nowell, Tkacik, & Dahlberg, 2018; Mastrocola & Flynn, 2017; Morrison-Beedy & Rossiter, 2018; Pierce, 2017; Phillips & Lincoln, 2017; Southwell et al., 2018; Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topf, 2018; Zhang, 2018). Alshuler and Yarab (2018) asserted that outreach, departmental advising, as well as peer support and counseling are recommended to not only assist in veteran support services but may increase academic success on-and-off campus. Durosko (2017) provided transitional stabilities for veteran students, including financial support, point-of-contacts, degree pathways, veteran-specific services, and cultural shifts to provide social and academic assistance during the education process. Likewise, Hammond (2017a) described distractions and disruptions to the classroom as impeding academic success and causing negative academic achievement when veterans did not participate or have support services available.

A practical and useful implementation of veteran student services can provide assistance but may not be a predictor of academic achievement. Kirchner (2015) summarized that support services are needed for current and former service members due to transition obstacles. However, until retention, graduation, and student satisfaction rates for veteran students are shown altered by veteran resources centers, student

organizations, or other programs, federal government support and assistance will not change. Lange et al. (2016) concluded through case studies that student veteran support services would vary among institutions but must provide practical and useful information at the individual and campus level. LeMire (2017) and Pierce (2017) found that developed programming and library services assisted with efforts to assimilate veteran students in transition. This support assists with developing community and encouraging resources that directly provided academic assistance. Leslie and Koblinsky (2017) aligned focus groups to determine that campus support is not the only factor that assists in leading to success amongst veteran pursuing degree paths. Veterans' experience and emotional support are needed from spouses, partners, parents, siblings, and older children to move past transition challenges and become academically successful.

Next, while veteran student support services aim to inform and assist veteran students, understanding and identifying barriers to academic success may be needed. Lim et al. (2018) gave a differing view that faculty and staff must be cognizant of cultural bias towards student veterans to understand and limit these in the transition and academic quality and success of the student. Mastrocola and Flynn (2017) and Aikens et al. (2015) offered that veteran students battle suicide, substance abuse, homelessness, crime, and other mental health issues, and due to such, peer support is a component that can assist students and teachers in better understanding academic barriers and success. Morrison-Beedy and Rossiter (2018) focused on understanding physical and mental healthcare for veteran students as an opportunity to build a relationship and veteran-focused transformation process to build professional and academic success. In another study,

Phillips and Lincoln (2017) described the necessity of understanding veterans'
individualized needs to assist in limiting administrative and academic barriers that could
potentially impact success, rendering broad services as inconclusive.

In addition, Southwell et al. (2018) stated that veteran students saw increased
awareness and cognitive presence when support services from faculty and academic
advising were instituted. These mandatory sessions, through policy and practice, assisted
with fostering awareness and providing transitional assistance to this unique student
population (Southwell et al., 2018). Taylor, Parks, and Edwards (2016) developed that
shifting academic and administrative policy to accommodate veteran students increased
students' progression towards completing degree programs. However, the
accommodations could lead to dependencies from this student population rather than
instilling independence and accountability. Recent findings also suggest that a lack
understanding of support services and academic outcomes can impede the veteran student
population in success (Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topf, 2018). Lastly, Zhang (2018)
found that veterans were likely to have increased academic success and achievement
when they previously had experience in higher education, including exposure to veteran
student support services.

In summary, this literature review included studies that showed the impact of the
existence of veteran student support services on a veteran's academic achievement in
postsecondary education. Evidence regarding how participation in veteran student
support services affects academic achievement is still lacking, showing a gap in practice
needing to be researched further. While support for a veteran student in higher education

is important in adapting to the academic and administrative needs of a higher education institution, the studies discussed did not show evidence of the effects of participation in veteran student support services on veteran students' academic achievement. I presented studies in the literature review that showed how veteran student support services offered at institutions could impact veteran students' academic achievement. However, there are fewer studies that address specifically on how veteran students' participation in veteran student support services correlates with their academic achievement. Because veteran students encounter different challenges as opposed to traditional students, additional research is needed for this aspect of this student population.

Implications

Higher education institutions that have implemented veteran student support services have not provided evidence on the effects of participation in these services on veteran students' academic achievement. I explored the effect of participation in veteran student support services on veteran student academic achievement, as measured by GPA, in this study. The results of this study could have implications on the implementation of veteran student support services to better assist with increasing academic achievement in the veteran student population at higher education institutions.

Understanding the effects veteran student support services has on veteran students' academic achievement, my study could influence higher education administrators' decisions about student services and policy. Distinguishing the benefits to veteran students that veteran student support services can offer could affect administrators' support of veteran student support services in higher education

institutions and the implementation of those services. Identifying the effects of veteran student support services on veteran students' academic achievement could help administrators, faculty, and staff at higher education institutions better understand the veteran student support services needed. Families of veteran students could come to appreciate the value of veteran support services to veteran students' education, and veteran student support services could become more existent across higher education institutions. Veteran students could benefit the most from learning how participation in veteran student support services affects their academic achievement. The greater community benefit from this research and findings could be the assistance in identifying specific populations of veteran students who need additional support in academic achievement by demographic and location.

My research study could lead to a reevaluation of the current policy and implementation of veteran student support services in higher education institutions. An appropriate deliverable of this project's results is a position paper, which is the most efficient way to disseminate the information due to the importance of the local problem. Additionally, a position paper was developed to offer higher education institution leaders with a description of the study and its results and contributed to recommendations to assist with veteran student support services and potential academic achievement in veteran students.

Summary

Researchers have indicated that the addition of academic and administrative options in offered veteran student support services are positively linked to veteran

students' increased academic achievement. However, veteran student support services are limited to nonexistent at higher education institutions across the United States. This is counterproductive to the recommendations of the government and other agencies regarding the needed support for veteran students completing their education at a higher education institution. The purpose of this study was to explore the effect participation in veteran student supports services has on veteran students' GPA. I intended to add to the growing body of literature on veteran student support services and academic achievement. In Section 1, the theoretical foundation was shown to be the within-college effects framework to identify student experiences that influence and determine success during the pursuit of an academic program. In the literature review, I exhausted current research showing that veteran student support services are positively associated with increased academic achievement for veteran students. In Section 2, the causal-comparative study is described and justified, explaining the plausibility of the study as related to the problem of a lack of adequate veteran student support services. The plan for data collection and analysis is also described and justified.

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Approach

In this quantitative study, I used a casual-comparative design to assess the effect of veteran student support services on veteran students' academic achievement. I addressed the following research question:

RQ1: What is the effect of participation in veteran student support services on veteran student academic achievement?

I used a postpositivism ontology to guide the research question in this study. Because the research question incorporates a deterministic system that relates to cause and effect, the approach assisted me in determining the existence of the veteran support services at higher education institutions while the research question was designed to determine if the participation of veteran student support services effects veteran students' academic achievement (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Given the nature of this quantitative study, I chose a nonexperimental, causal-comparative research design to better understand if the participation in veteran student support services affects the academic achievement of veteran students.

Specifically, I chose a causal-comparative design as this design involved comparing groups to determine whether an independent variable caused a change in a dependent variable. Also, causal-comparative research is a design that determines the cause or significance of differences that have already occurred between two comparison groups. Based on the independent variable (i.e., veteran student participation in veteran student support services versus nonparticipation in veteran student support services) and

the dependent variable (academic achievement as measured by GPA), a casual-comparative design allowed the comparison of differences, determining if participation in veteran student support services has an effect on veteran students' academic achievement.

Setting and Sample

The target population for this study included veteran students from the student body at a public higher education institution in the state of Maryland. I adopted a convenience sampling method for this study. Convenience sampling is used at the immediate access and willingness of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Archival data of veteran students were retrieved from $N = 128$ veteran students. Meanwhile, the selection of a larger sample added to the validity of the study while associating the results to be generalized and applied to the whole population (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A priori power analysis with G*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009) for a fixed effect, omnibus, one-way ANOVA showed a required sample size of $N = 128$ students, $n = 64$ per group, with the independent variables (i.e., veteran student participation in veteran student support services versus nonparticipation in veteran student support services), with an effect size set at medium ($f^2 = .25$), power set at 80%, and an alpha significance level of .05. Also, these veteran student data were selected based upon if they have or have not participated in veteran student support services while enrolled full-time (12 or more semester or quarter hours). These students were selected to increase the consistency of their enrollment status. In addition, these students consisted of undergraduate veteran students enrolled in their first year, including their first term, at the institutions selected. These institutions also had comparable veteran student support

services, offering individualized assistance with G.I Bill education benefits, tuition assistance, academic advising, degree planning, financial aid and scholarship, transfer and career services, and regional Department of Veteran Affairs services. By selecting these students, the influence of a part-time workload and fewer courses minimized the impact on GPA. Due to the use of historical archival data with predetermined groups of higher education students per designated enrollments, random assignment was not an option (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Random assignment was not used specifically in this study because there were multiple levels of measurement in this study.

Instrumentation and Materials

In this study, I intended to determine the effect of participation in veteran student support services on the academic achievement of veteran students. Participation in veteran student support services was the independent variable. However, only veteran support services were taken into account that aimed to influence academic achievement. In a first step, participation was operationalized with *yes* (at least one time) and *no* (zero times). Academic achievement as the dependent variable was measured by GPA with numerical values from 0.0 to 4.0. In a second step, the number of times students participated in veteran support services were categorized (1 time, 2 times, and 3 or more times) to investigate if the amount of participation had any effects on GPA. Moreover, participation and use of veteran student support services were determined based upon a veteran student's appointment with the support service at each institution. At each institution, an appointment was scheduled for students needing detailed assistance and categorized as each time attended.

Also, the data gathered were from student records at a public higher education institution from the 2016-2017 academic school year (archival data). The archived data detailed each veteran student's participation in veteran student support service office at each institution. Each appointment, which was considered as participation, was logged by the veteran student support services at the institution. Veteran student transcripts were used to determine their academic achievement and used to collect their GPAs. Because GPAs are calculated grade-based curriculum standards at the public higher education institution, there was reliability in the data (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Meanwhile, veteran student data from the public higher education institution's veteran student support services were used to determine participation by the sample population. Specifically, participation in veteran student support services detailed an arranged appointment between the institutional staff member and the veteran student. In this study, participation and use of veteran student support services were determined based upon a veteran student's appointment with the support service at each institution. At each institution, an appointment was scheduled for students needing detailed assistance. Furthermore, a visit to veteran student support services at each institution was defined as a quick conversation or question, therefore not needing extensive assistance.

Upon requesting the specific veteran student data needed, a representative from each institution identified the availability of the data and timeline needed to collect. Once gathered, I then worked directly to meet and visit with each representative at each institution to collect such data via Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. This data were then stored and analyzed on a password protected hard drive where only I had access.

Data Collection and Analysis

Before data collection, I received approval by Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct research for this study, Walden IRB approval no. 01-23-19-0738554. I used a causal-comparative research design and analyzed archived data from public higher education institutions in the state of Maryland to determine veteran students' academic achievements. To gain access to archival data, I requested access from administrators responsible for research at public higher education institutions in the state of Maryland. Once approval was granted, I communicated with two institutions regarding the specific data that were needed. After the administrators collected the data needed, I met with them to collect the data for the study. Data collection included copying the data into a password protected storage device. The independent variable in this study included veteran students who participated in veteran student support services and veteran students who did not participate in veteran student support services (nominal scale variable). The dependent variable in this study was the veteran students' GPA (ratio scale variable). I analyzed the data collected using SPSS 25.0 for Windows. I addressed the research question by analyzing the archival data and ANOVA to determine the differences in the academic achievement of veteran students who participated and who did not participate in veteran student support services.

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

A critical assumption of this study was that all veteran students had the opportunity to participate in veteran student support services while enrolled at their higher education institution. If one possibility of participation in veteran student support

services was to improve veteran students' academic achievement, students must participate in the student support services provided by the higher education institution.

Limitations of the study included the inconsistent participation levels of students in veteran student support services, the influence of outside support services, and the limited number of variables. Veteran students' inconsistent participation level in veteran student support services was a limitation because not all veteran students are motivated to participate in veteran support services. Meanwhile, veteran students who participated in other veteran student support services than those offered by the institution might have skewed results. Next, due to the difference in group size, the one-way ANOVA results were less robust, which resulted in decreased statistical power. Additionally, participation in veteran student support services could vary from term to term. As previously mentioned, participation and use of veteran student support services were determined based upon a veteran student's appointment with the support service at each institution. At each institution, an appointment was scheduled for students needing detailed assistance. Furthermore, a visit to veteran student support services at each institution was defined as a quick conversation or question, therefore not needing extensive assistance. Lastly, the use of two variables may be too simplistic to explore the difference in GPA with and without veteran students' participation in veteran student support services.

The scope of this study was a student population of two specific public higher education institutions and was limited to the GPAs of the students and their participation in veteran student support services. It did not include other higher education institutions, including private institutions, other academic achievement measurements, or other

veteran student support services in which the student may participate in outside of the institution.

Protection of Participants' Rights

The protection of participants' rights during research is necessary for upholding ethical standards. In compliance with university policy and U.S. regulations on data collection for this study, I sought assurance from the IRB of Walden University. Once approved, the IRB allowed this research and data collection to begin, therefore complying with all university and federal regulations surrounding data.

It is of the utmost importance to protect the participants' rights, including the confidentiality of students and their academic records in the research of this study. Because I reviewed archival records in this study, I did not anticipate involving any participants directly and maintained their confidentiality. The digital records in the form of transcripts were maintained in a secure database, filed and password protected for my view only. Additionally, all participants had their names removed from the digital transcript files and were assigned a number for digital record purposes. After all data had been collected from the files, all information relating to the student records was removed and deleted from the storage device.

With the data gathered from archival records and examined to provide education information, therefore, informed parental consent was not required. Meanwhile, with there being no direct interaction with students in this study, any identifiable information was removed from students, meaning no potential risk was possible.

Data Analysis Results

An archived data set were received that included veteran students' GPAs and
participation and non-participation in veteran student support services at two public
higher education institutions in the state of Maryland. This data included two groups of
veteran students, encompassing 64 per group and totaling 128 veteran students. Upon
receiving the data, this data were entered into SPSS 25.0. The data were then reviewed
for data entry errors and accuracy. This review included any numbers that were out of
range or missing amongst the data set. The data presented moderate skewness at -.768
and kurtosis at -.528, both within the -3;+3 range (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013), signifying
a lack of outliers. In addition, I reviewed each line of data to make sure each response
had been documented, and no data set were skipped. Upon completion, the data I
reviewed did not show any responses that needed to be discarded. All needed
prerequisites for ANOVA were checked. I ensured the normality by conducting the
Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The Kolmogorow-Smirnov test showed a normal distribution:
Kolmogorov-Smirnow = 0.146 and $p < 0.01$. Meanwhile, I assessed the assumption of
homoscedasticity by conducting Levene's test for homogeneity of variance. The results
were not significant as $F(1,126) = .925$ $p = .388$, signifying homogeneity of variance.

Next, a one-way ANOVA was completed to determine the differences in the
academic achievement of veteran students who participated or who did not participate in
veteran student support services. Of the 128 veteran students, about 43% ($n = 55$)
participated in veteran student support services, and about 57% ($n = 73$) did not
participate in veteran student support services. Results from the one-way ANOVA were

not significant, $F(1,126) = .065$, $p = .799$, $\eta^2 = .001$. There were no significant differences

in the academic achievement of veteran students who participated and who did not

participate in veteran student support services. These data are depicted in Table 1 and

Figure 1.

Table 1

One-Way Analysis of Veteran Students' Participation (yes/no) in Veteran Student Support Services on GPA

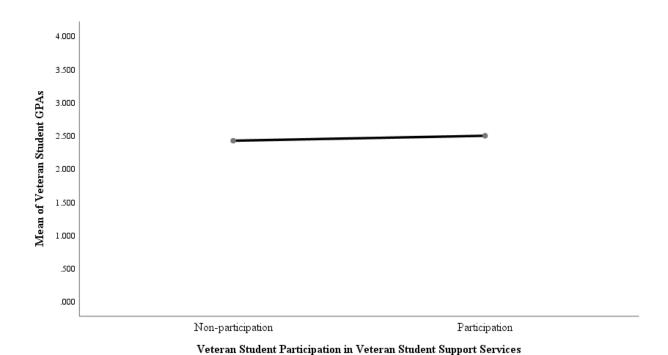| Veteran students group	n	M	SD	df	F	p
Participation	55	2.49	1.16	1, 126	.065	.799
Nonparticipation	73	2.42	1.34			

Figure 1. Participation in veteran student support services by GPA.

Furthermore, a one-way ANOVA with categorized number of participation in

veteran student support services as an independent variable was performed to determine a

possible effect on the academic achievement of veteran students. Although the data was

not sufficient for this analysis (low *n* in the categories), my goal is to show the results as

a means of completeness for this study. Of the 128 veteran students, about 57% ($n = 73$)

did not participate in veteran student support services, about 34% ($n = 44$) participated

once, about 6% ($n = 8$) participated twice, and 3% ($n = 3$) participated three or more

times. Results from the one-way ANOVA were not significant, $F(1,126) = .703$, $p = .552$,

$\eta^2 = .017$. This data is depicted in Table 2.

Table 2

One-Way Analysis of Veteran Students' Number of Participation in Veteran Student Support Services on GPA

Veteran student GPA	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*df*	*F*	*p*
0 times	73	2.59	1.20	1, 127	.703	.552
1 times	44	2.42	1.44			
2 times	8	1.96	1.28			
3 or more times	3	2.11	2.01			
Total	128	2.48	1.31			

In addition, I evaluated the number of times in which a veteran student did or did

not participate in veteran student support services. Veteran student support services were

evaluated to determine if the number of times participated predicted academic

achievement, as measure by GPA. The result from the linear regression was not

significant. The number of participations in veteran student support services predicting

academic achievement yielded a negative *B* value of -.218. Meanwhile, the linear

regression also yielded an *R* value of -.120 and was determined not statistically

significant ($p < .05$).

In this project study, I conducted a causal-comparative study to determine the

effect of veteran student participation in veteran student support services on their

academic achievement. I hypothesized that the academic achievement of veteran students

would be higher for those veteran students who participated in veteran student support

services than veteran students who did not participate in veteran student support services.

In this study, I addressed the research question by testing the following null hypothesis:

RQ1: What is the effect of participation in veteran student support services on

veteran student academic achievement?

$H_0 1$: There is no statistically significant difference in the academic

achievement of veteran students who participated in veteran student

support services compared to students who did not participate in veteran

student support services.

$H_a 1$: There is a statistically significant difference in the academic

achievement of veteran students who participated in veteran student

support services compared to students who did not participate in veteran

student support services.

The results of the data analysis of Hypothesis 01 indicated that there was no

significant difference in GPA whether veteran students participated or did not participate

in veteran student support services. Meanwhile, Section 3 defines the project that stemmed from the study findings and conclusions. The policy recommendation paper that I prepared was the culmination of research that was conducted regarding the effects of veteran student participation in veteran student support services on their academic achievement. This policy paper includes background of the existing problem. Policy recommendation papers were investigated to demonstrate the needed for immediate change given the scenario. I reviewed academic support services that produced increased academic achievement of traditional and non-traditional students detailed in state and federal policy recommendations. A literature review on policy papers is presented in Section 3, as well as a description of the project, the rationale, and an evaluation plan.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the effect participation in veteran student support services has on veteran students' academic achievement. I investigated the differences in academic achievement (as measured by GPA) between veteran students who participated in veteran student support services and veteran students who have not.

The data analysis and findings of this study revealed that participation in veteran student services by veteran students has no statistically significant effect on academic achievement. As a result of my study, I chose a position paper as an outcome of this study. In this section, I discuss the policy recommendations of increasing academic resources that have a proven effect on academic achievement for veteran students (see Appendix A). It is important to revisit the academic support and resources that are a part of veteran student support services in order to evaluate and provide possible changes or updates that assist veteran students academically. Academic support and resources can improve the student experience and assist in providing more opportunities for academic achievement to this student population. Additionally, in this section, I detail the goals, rationale, supporting literature, project description, evaluation, and implications for social change resulting from the project.

Rationale

This project was developed based on the lack of knowledge regarding the effect of students' participation in veteran student support services on academic achievement. My data analysis showed no statistically significant difference in GPA when students

participated in veteran student support services. If a significant goal for veteran supports services is to help veteran students achieve academically, the services that the veterans are accessing are not effectively helping them become better students. Subsequently, due to higher education administrators creating policies and procedures to enable such veteran student support services, it is necessary to provide a policy recommendation to administrators at higher education institutions. Additionally, the findings of this study are discussed in the policy recommendations in an effort to increase academic support and resources for the veteran student population.

Review of the Literature

Through the data analysis in Section 2, it was noted that there was no statistically significant change in GPAs when veteran students participated or did not participate in veteran student support services at higher education institutions. Based upon there being no statistically significant change in veteran students' GPAs, the veteran student support services being offered to veteran students may not provide enough academic support and resources to increase academic achievement. Veteran students need academic support and resources available that can increase their academic achievement. In order to contribute background and support for a policy recommendation to be made to higher education institutions, I reviewed literature accessed through the Walden University library system. Specifically, Walden University's e-library system provided access to electronic databases, including Education Source and Education Resource Information Center (ERIC). Key search terms included but were not limited to *academic achievement, academic support, academic resources, policy*, and *policy recommendations*.

Higher Education Policy

Recent studies have offered evidence that higher education policy is designed to assist academic growth and achievement amongst all student populations (Brandon, Franken, & Penney, 2015; Cheslock, Ortagus, Umbricht, & Wymore, 2016; Deming & Figlio, 2016; Hill, Walkington, & France, 2016; Wisker & Masika, 2017). Brandon et al. (2015) described the necessity of leadership to determine policies to safeguard students and the integrity of the institution through collaborative learning processes. Next, Cheslock et al. (2016) stated that institutions must not only take into account students' academic growth and achievement but understand management, operations, and the fiscal environment when setting outcomes and policy. Deming and Figlio (2016) encouraged that current colleges and universities develop policies to promote academic achievement, thus being held institutionally accountable by federal regulations as well. Hill et al. (2016) surmised that policy and practice are interwoven to integrate academics with the goal of academic achievement. Likewise, Wisker and Masika (2017) articulated that policy must be designed around social and academic imperatives that support students while adhering to institutional values.

Higher education policy exists to assist with academic growth and academic achievement at higher education institutions. It is then important to understand how higher education policy is designed by higher education institutions. By doing so, higher education policy recommendations can then be formed.

Higher Education Policy Recommendations

Studies have been conducted to determine best practices when adding to existing policy and making policy recommendations in higher education (Hackmann, 2016; Orr, Murphy, Smylie, & McCarthy, 2015; Petrovskiy & Agaova, 2016; Rattan, Savani, Chugh, & Dweck, 2015). Hackmann (2016) suggested that research is needed before a policy change by an institutional leader. Policymakers must take findings and develop awareness among leadership to gain support for the necessary recommendation (Hackmann, 2016). Meanwhile, Orr et al. (2015) described that it is necessary for professionals to be critical of the quality and nature of a potential recommendation while understanding the scope and nature of such an effort. Petrovskiy and Aganova (2016) continued that a thorough review needs to be taken into account prior to a change in policy with necessary recommendations and possible transitional periods. Pucciarelli and Kaplan (2016) established that higher education leaders, including administrators, staff, and faculty, need to identify challenges and understand the implications of research to instill in practice and policy. Rattan et al. (2015) asserted that policymakers must partner with academic researchers to introduce effective changes.

While higher education policy recommendations are needed to understand what change needs to be implemented, it is important to understand how the recommendations are determined. By thoroughly investigating the research needed in making higher education policy recommendations, it is possible to determine what changes need implementation.

Higher Education Policy Implementation

Understanding the need for updating policy brings forth the measure of changing policy and the ability to close gaps by the institution (Ellegood, Bernard, Sweeney, Duncan, & Burns, 2019; Kazonga, 2018; Keller, 2018; Schulte et al., 2017; Wheelan, 2016). Ellegood et al. (2019) incorporated the need for evaluation to characterize why a policy addition or adjustment is instituted. Meanwhile, after such implementation is complete, performance must be measured to record significant strengths or limitations. Also, Kazonga (2018) asserted that once the evaluation and the new policy is developed, accountability and flexibility are needed to ensure academic quality and proper institutional outcomes are maintained. Keller (2018) explained that institutions must transform and support academic achievement for students. By transforming to incorporate support, institutions must update policies and procedures of value that structure the outcomes of the institution. Schulte et al. (2017) interjected that whether institutions are creating or updating policy, administrators must be committed and align the outcomes with the institutional mission and values to allow for an equal opportunity of success. Lastly, Wheelan (2016) acknowledged that student populations offer a key factor in policy implementation. By providing training and education to support a potential change, administrators, staff, and faculty can offer high-quality support for these initiatives.

Higher education policy implementation allows the opportunity to understand how a determined policy change will be administered with a higher education institution. Through understanding the factors that make up higher education policy and the

recommendations associated, the implementation of policy can be determined and enacted to ensure success at the institutional level.

Academic Support and Resources

Additionally, various researchers have concluded that academic support and resources are mandatory throughout a student's journey and experience in higher education (Mason, 2018; Olson-McBride, Hassemer, & Hoepner, 2016; Skoglund, Wall, & Kiene, 2018; Soria, Fransen, & Nackerud, 2017; Wekullo, 2019). Mason (2018) identified that support practitioners must engage and assist with developing students' academic management. These actions can help students in overcoming academic challenges and provide improved academic success. Olson et al. (2016) stated that at-risk and underserved students could benefit academically from additional support, including academic coaching, course tutoring, smaller class sizes, and participation in undergraduate research to assist with developmental outcomes. Additionally, Skoglund et al. (2018) believed collaborative learning experiences with peers could assist students in developing independence and learner responsibilities. Soria et al. (2017) summarized that exposure to library services within academic support assists in developing skills that directly impact academic achievement. Wekullo (2019) asserted that identifying engagement opportunities for students can lead to an increased use of academic support and can help students to continue to build relationships amongst peers, faculty, and administration.

Academic support and resources are needed to support a student through their journey at a higher education institution. To assist in promoting academic achievement, it

is necessary to understand what academic support and resources can effectively provide that leads to student success. Next, I present the steps to understanding how to add the needed academic support and resources.

Adding Academic Support and Resources

Other researchers have summarized that after determining the academic support and resources needed through research, it is the responsibility of the institution to implement such solutions (Campbell, Dortch, & Burt, 2018; Dreyer, 2017; Njenga, Rodello, Hartl, & Jacob, 2017; Patterson & Wickstrom, 2017; White, 2018). Campbell et al. (2018) suggested that institutions must research their students' learning process and implement policies and systems that provide challenges to students' growth. Dreyer (2017) explained that there must not be a gap between policy and implementation of academic support and resources as this will cause contextual differences and not ensure quality. Njenga et al. (2017) determined that institutions must overcome the challenges of identifying where academic support needs to be met. Through institutional research and data analysis, administrators, staff, and faculty must work to incorporating policy and changes to assist students, particularly through academic support and resources (Njenga et al., 2017). Patterson and Wickstrom (2017) shed light on acknowledging challenges and implementing actions, such as academic support and resources, but the strategy is needed to identify strengths and weaknesses and to contribute to collective learning. White (2018) instilled that introducing a policy that aligns with the institution and community allows for leadership and management of the implemented support and resources to be successful.

By examining how academic support and resources are added at higher education institutions, I believe it is possible to understand the best practices needed for leadership to implement successfully. Through doing so, administrators, faculty, and staff can better understand how they can support students while providing necessary academic support and resources to positively influence their education and academic achievement.

In summary, this literature review included studies that showed the impact of higher education policy and how those policies enable academic growth and achievement among the varying student population at higher education institutions. Next, I provided studies that described how best practices are formulated when making policy recommendations at the higher education level. Other studies were reviewed that showed how the implementation of recommendations occur when a change in policy is needed at a higher education institution. Once a policy change need is determined, it was followed up by the evaluation of studies that detail the need for academic support and resources amongst higher education institutions. And, lastly, I reviewed studies that described how academic support and resources were created or added to the existing policy to assist with student challenges and provide solutions.

Project Description

The project developed for this doctoral study is a policy paper aimed at helping higher education leaders, including administrators, faculty, and staff, identify the need for academic support and resources as related to veteran student support services. By providing policy recommendations, higher education institutions will have the opportunity to encourage a more supportable approach to veteran students in need of

academic support or resources for educational assistance. Findings indicated that there was no statistical significance between participation in veteran student support services and academic achievement. The policy paper includes recommendations that call for requiring academic support and resources that have been proven to increase academic achievement based on participation. The literature review examined peer-reviewed research on topics related to higher education policy, recommendations, and implementation, as well as academic support and resources and how to create or add such support or resources at a higher education institution. The literature review and the findings assisted in forming the policy paper. The overall objective of the policy paper is to help ensure that the problem of the effect of veteran student support services on veteran students' academic achievement at the local setting was addressed in sustainability. Project implementation will involve briefing stakeholders in an effort to inform them of the research findings and encourage adoption of the recommendations detailed in the policy paper.

Project Evaluation Plan

The purpose of employing new policies regarding academic support and resources is to provide an opportunity for increased academic achievement among veteran students. The implementation of new policies should be evaluated in an outcome-based, summative manner. These policy implementations will make gradual changes to institutions existing policies. Due to this, it will take time to see the results of adding such academic support and resources to veteran student support services. The best measure of academic achievement would be through the identification of veteran student GPAs. The

institutions will be able to compare term over term data to compare academic achievement. It should be noted when the new academic support and resources were created or added in relation to veteran student support services for student progress. Additionally, comparisons of the veteran students' GPAs can be formalized and shared with internal stakeholders and departments to assist with future improvement. The key stakeholders in this project evaluation plan are the veteran student population, who are directly affected by the policy changes, as well as the higher education institutions, including administrators, faculty, and staff.

Project Implications

Local Benefits

The implications of this project purpose of implementing new policies regarding academic support and resources are to provide an opportunity for increased academic achievement among veteran students at the two higher education institutions in the state of Maryland. I believe adding a policy to implement academic support and resources that increase academic achievement in veteran students would be beneficial to the institution and community as well (Olson et al., 2016). Also, by increasing academic achievement in this student population, institutions would potentially see increases in retention and graduation rates (Dreyer, 2017). These educated students would be entering the community and joining the workforce as subject-matter experts within their field.

Broader Benefits

In a broader view, the implications of this policy change would be for higher education institutions, including administrators, faculty, and staff. Creating or adding a

policy that acknowledges the challenges of students' needs for academic support and

resources will be a much-needed benefit (Patterson & Wickstrom, 2017). Meanwhile,

higher education institution leadership, including administrators, staff, and faculty, would

be able to align policy and academic support with the institution and community.

Overcoming these academic challenges and adding academic support and resources for

veteran students have the opportunity to develop skills that directly impact academic

achievement (Soria et al., 2017). The policy change would bring to identify where

institutional change is needed and assist the veteran student population.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

The project study addressed the problem of the effect participation in veteran student support services has on veteran students' academic achievement. The position paper is a strength of this project study. Position papers allow for a critical examination of an issue with accompanying research and facts to support a suggested course of action (Adams, 2014). Specifically, this position paper provides information on the problem of participation in veteran student support services and on veteran students' academic achievement and addresses how the problem could be solved through the implementation of policy changes to academic support and resources at higher education institutions.

There are multiple limitations to the project. The policy recommendations of the position paper are limited in the scope and direction. The expectation of a statistically significant change is hopeful but potentially may not be a reality. Based on higher education institutions potential strategic initiatives, immediate action will not be taken to assist the veteran student population. However, the opportunity to propose such policy recommendations allows for the institutional evaluation of the current academic support and resources, as they relate to veteran student support services, to be addressed.

Another limitation of this study was that the focus of the study was at two public institutions in the state of Maryland. A researcher using a larger scope could magnify and study each public institution in the state to better understand how participation in veteran student support services effects academic achievement in all veteran students. However,

understanding a small sample of schools allows for additional progress relating to this topic instead of no research.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The problem of the effect of veteran student support services on veteran student's academic achievement can be addressed in various alternative approaches. Instead of approaching the problem by evaluating veteran students' GPA from term to term and their participation in veteran student support services, it would be possible to evaluate multiple terms or even the students' entire academic career. Meanwhile, additional categorization of the types of veteran students could be beneficial. To be more specific, based on the veteran students' academic experience, they could be more prepared for the transition to their academic career than other veteran students. This information could better assist in potentially understanding how veteran student support services affect each veteran student when participating.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

In this study, I focused on reporting on prior works in this field to demonstrate scholarship. The completion of new research, based on previous studies, supplied new research and facts surrounding the problem. In order to develop scholarship, education, preservation, and critical thinking are needed. Through completing this project study, I was determined to evaluate the existence of veteran student support services and their impact on veteran students at higher education institutions. Higher education professionals should understand and make an effort to enhance the student experience for

all students at higher education institutions. I do not believe all higher education professionals understand the barriers students face, including those of veteran students.

In this study, previous research and findings were examined to explain the importance of veteran student support services in higher education. Additionally, I investigated research and learned about specific veteran support services and their effects on academic achievement and other student experiences. In my research, I discovered the effects of veteran student support services through participation in a higher education institution. Based on my research, I can defend the need for the study I conducted, including evidence that led to the conclusion. While I have presented my research, I am eager to have the opportunity to allow others to study and examine my findings. Through their support and critique, I will be able to advance my scholarship practice and skills to become a more knowledgeable and well-informed researcher.

This project study was developed from perceiving the problem at a higher education institution, researching literature, conducting the study of veteran students at higher education institutions, and projecting potential solutions to the problem based upon research. The project study was developed due to the needed solution to the problem and logical application of how the need could not be met. Furthermore, as it relates to leadership and change, it is paramount to understand when change is needed and incorporate such change as a leader. As a higher education professional, it is my role to identify processes that can better assist students, staff, faculty, and administrators. Meanwhile, upon developing awareness for such issues, I must understand what needs to be implemented for such a change. During this project study, I learned that a strong

leader is persistent and never backs down from a challenge. Anyone who is willing to investigate a problem, conduct research, and develop a solution for change understands the value of being a leader. Through developing and completing this project study, I believe I have established the ability to understand change and excel in leadership as I further investigate and understand higher education.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

Based on the work accomplished in this study, I believe the policy recommendations detailed are important in improving the educational experience of the veteran student population at higher education institutions. The results of this study answered the research question: What is the effect of participation in veteran student support services on veteran student academic achievement? While there was no statistically significant difference in the participation of veteran student support services on academic achievement, the results showed that the provided support does not statistically assist the veteran student population.

Moreover, this led to the introduction of policy recommendations to better assist veteran students. These policies were created to increase academic achievement based on veteran students' participation in veteran student support services. Through implementing policy to add academic support and resources with proven benefits of academic achievement, veteran students' education can benefit based upon their participation.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

This study has practical implications because it relates to the effect participation in veteran student support services has on veteran students' academic achievement.

Adjusting policies surrounding veteran student support services can help students gain needed academic support. Specifically, adjusting policies can assist students in improving their education and potential academic achievement. These adjustments in policy possibly could establish a guide and become a blueprint to other higher education institutions, therefore indicating the necessity to evaluate the policies, procedures, and research of increasing veteran student support services. in this study, I examined GPA as a measure of academic achievement and participation in veteran student support services. It is possible that future researchers might examine other measures of academic achievements, such as retention or graduation rates, and other forms of success indicators in higher education. Moreover, future researchers might evaluate the effect participation in veteran student support services has on veteran students' academic achievement in first-year or transfer students. Further, with a better understanding of the effect potential veteran student support services has on academic achievement, additional higher education institutions could incorporate additional veteran student support services to this student population.

Conclusion

In this section, I offered a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the policy recommendations, including the potential for this policy change to persuade administrators, faculty, and staff of institutions of the value of academic achievement found in veteran student support services, as well as the scope of proposed changes and how this issue could be overcome and alternate solutions to increasing academic achievement in veteran students. This section also contained a discussion of my

scholarship development through the completion of this project study and an examination of my becoming a practitioner of research and a project developer, as well as my reflections on becoming an education leader of social change. Additionally, this section included a reflection of the importance of the research, policy recommendations and an explanation of the impact that the policy recommendation could have on the veteran student population in higher education.

I conducted this quantitative study by gathering archived data related to veteran students' academic achievement and participation and nonparticipation in veteran student support services. The findings of this study will be presented in the form of a position paper to higher education administrators. My goal is that this study's findings will be used to support and further research surrounding veteran student support services.

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Appendix A: The Project

Policy Recommendations: The Effect of Veteran Student Support Services on Veteran

Students' Academic Achievement

by

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Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the effects of participation in veteran student support services on veteran student academic achievement at the higher education institutional level. The policy recommendations were developed based on the research findings. In addition, the policy recommendations addressed the lack of academic support and resources to assist the veteran student population. Those recommendations include the following:

- Evaluating current veteran student support services at higher education institutions.

- Potentially creating veteran student support services if none currently exist at the institution.

- Identifying and adding academic support or resources as part of veteran student support services with a proven influence on academic achievement.

- Creating guidelines that are flexible and aligned with institutional outcomes with the support of staff, faculty, and administrators of the institution.

- Evaluating the academic support and resources of the veteran student support services to ensure quality and success for veteran students at the higher education institution.

Each recommendation provided was carefully examined to ensure the policy recommendation would be understood among higher education institutions, including the

administrators, faculty, and staff that will need to support such. The potential for the

implementation of the recommendation was also examined thoroughly to understand the

policy requirements and steps. The findings of the study were instrumental in the action

set forth with the distribution to all required stakeholders. As part of the study, there are

no requirements to implement any of the recommendations made in this policy paper.

In addition, this policy paper brings forth information regarding the potential

implementation of academic support and resource policies as they relate to veteran

student support services at higher education institutions. The policy recommendations in

this paper target higher education policy, including the implementation of policy related

to academic support and resources. Lastly, the research findings shared in this policy

paper examine how to implement academic support and resources to veteran student

support services to increases academic achievement among the veteran student

population.

Methodology

A quantitative research design was used to collect data for this study. The data

was analyzed to determine if participation in veteran student support services had an

effect on veteran students' academic achievement. Specifically, a causal-comparative

research design best allowed for the comparison of groups to determine whether the

independent variable (i.e., veteran student participation in veteran student support

services versus non-participation in veteran student support services) caused a change in

the dependent variable (academic achievement as measured by GPA). The purpose of this

study was to address the local problem of the effect of participation in veteran student

support services have on veteran student's academic achievement. The research examined veteran student participation and non-participation in veteran student support services and the effect this had on academic achievement to determine the best approach to assisting the veteran student population.

Moreover, since a causal-comparative design allowed for the comparison of differences, in order to determine if participation in veteran student services had an effect on veteran students' academic achievement, a convenience sample method was used. Using a convenience sampling method allowed for direct admission and readiness of participants for this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Archived data were collected for further research in this study. My role as the researcher for this study was to gain approval to conduct the study at partnering institutions, collect the data needed, and analyze such data. The findings were recorded and examined for presentation. Additionally, these findings were summarized to show how the data relates to the local problem. Lastly, the findings of this study revealed that there is no statistically significant effect on academic achievement regarding veteran students who do participate in veteran student support services versus veteran students who do not. Thus, academic support and resources with an effect on academic achievement need to be added to veteran student support services to assist veteran students.

A policy paper was developed to suggest recommendations about the local problem of the effects of participation in veteran student support services on veteran students' academic achievement. The recommended policy suggests that academic support and resources be implemented by local higher education administrators. The

concern that exists with the current veteran support services available is the lack of effect in academic achievement based on participation versus non-participation by veteran students.

Policy Recommendations

Recommendation A

Higher education administrators will need to evaluate the current veteran student support services available at the institution in which they are employed. If no veteran student support services currently exist at the institution in which they are employed, this is an opportunity to understand the veteran student population at the institution and potentially add such services. If veteran student support services currently exist at the institution, then this is an opportunity to examine the services provided.

Recommendation B

Academic support and resources identified with a proven ability to increase academic achievement amongst student at higher education institutions include, but are not limited to, academic coaching, course tutoring, undergraduate research and library service requirements, engagement activities, such as social or career events, and resources such as small class sizes and collaborative learning initiatives.

Recommendation C

Once the academic support and resources are added or updated to the veteran student support services, higher education leaders will need to set guidelines for the use of such services by students and through staff and faculty. Academic support and resources should be flexible and aligned with institutional outcomes. Therefore, staff

should be designated to these services with background and experience assisting students in higher education. Additionally, office hours should be during times in which students frequent the institution for classes. Records of students using such services should be kept through sign-in sheets and cataloged notes. This will assist in understanding when and why students came to visit the academic support and resource service.

Recommendation D

Higher education administrators should develop a plan to evaluate each academic support and resource service added to the veteran student support services or updated at the institution. It is recommended that the institution then hold monthly meetings with the academic support or resource staff to evaluate the students receiving such support and identify ways for strategic improvement.

Higher Education Policy

Higher education policy allows administrators, faculty, and staff with the opportunity to pursue outcomes and to ensure sustainability and success. When it comes to institutional policy, Wisker and Masika (2017) believed that institutional values must be encompassed amongst social and academic needs when implemented and carried out. This allows for a clear connection between the needs of students and the needs of the academic and administrative staff. Meanwhile, in this process, Brandon et al. (2015) stated it is necessary for institutional leadership to determine policies to safeguard students and the integrity of the institution through collaborative learning processes. Due to this, institutions must understand the challenges that students face and determine proper solutions and implementation of such. Likewise, Deming and Figlio (2016) related

that institutions must further policy that promotes academic achievement while meeting accountability standards of accreditors, state, or federal regulators. This is supported as Cheslock et al. (2016) stated that institutions must factor students' academic growth and achievement as they determine the setting of outcomes in the policy. By clearly understanding student outcomes as it relates to academic growth and achievement, institutions can understand better understand the need for change or challenges occurring. And, lastly, is necessary for the institutional policy to reflect an integration of academic achievement amongst support and resources (Hill et al., 2016). Through understanding how higher education policy is built around a student's academic pursuit, it can be summarized that administrators, faculty, and staff must continually understand how to implement institutional policy as it relates to outcomes and student success.

Higher Education Policy Recommendations

At higher education institutions, to establish a policy or update previous policy, steps introducing recommendations must initially be determined. For example, Pucciarelli and Kaplan (2016) stated that higher education leaders, including administrators, staff, and faculty, need to identify challenges and understand the implications of research to instill in practice through policy. With policymakers partnering with academic research, effective changes can be implemented through policy immediately (Rattan et al., 2015). Moreover, research and findings must be presented to leadership to gain awareness and support for any future institutional policy change (Hackmann, 2016). This allows for institutions to add or update institutional policy to support previous or shifting outcomes and benefit the institution and its students.

Meanwhile, administrators, staff, and faculty must be critical of the quality and nature of potential policy recommendations while acknowledging the scope and nature of the efforts in relation to the institution (Orr et al., 2015). Pretroskiy and Aganova (2016) added that prior to any policy recommendation, a quality review must be taken into account to understand the change or transition occurs. By acknowledging when institutional policy recommendations are needed at higher education institutions, administrators, faculty, and staff can be better equipped to determine effective change.

Higher Education Policy Implementation

Once higher education policy has been researched and reviewed, the implementation of such a policy is needed. Once the evaluation and the new policy being created, accountability and flexibility are needed to support academic quality and maintain institutional outcomes (Kazonga, 2018). In support, Schulte et al. (2017) maintained that institutions, including administrators, staff, and faculty, must pledge and align the outcomes and institutional mission and values of the institution. As it relates to institutions outcomes, institutions must continue to measure a policy change to understand its strengths and limitations for students, faculty, staff, and administrators (Ellegood et al., 2019). Meanwhile, implementation also brings forth the need for flexibility and accountability to ensure all academic standards, such as quality and institutional outcomes, are maintained (Kazonga, 2018). In doing so, Keller (2018) asserted it is necessary for policy and procedural changes to take into account academic achievement during any implementation and transformation. Likewise, in the implementation of policy, extensive training and support are needed for administrators,

faculty, and staff to ensure the successful implementation of policy, especially those impacting key student populations (Wheelan, 2016). It is important that once a new policy has been determined that all efforts are taken to ensure institutional alignment and outcomes are met for all stakeholders.

Academic Support and Resources

As it relates to institutional policy, academic support and resources are put into place to assist students in academic achievement. In determining academic support and resources needed for students, it is necessary for administrators, faculty, and staff to engage and assist in developing solutions for overcoming academic challenges and improving achievement (Mason, 2018). In addition, Wekullo (2019) derived that by identifying engagement opportunities, relationships amongst peers, faculty, staff, and administration can be developed and lead to the increased use of academic support and resources. Specifically, when it comes to the variation of services provided, vulnerable students can benefit academically academic coaching, course tutoring, smaller class sizes, and participation in undergraduate research to assist with developmental outcomes (Olson et al., 2016). Meanwhile, a collaborative learning process amongst peers, in tutoring and academic coaching solutions, can develop independence and learner responsibilities to achieve success (Skoglund et al., 2018). Soria et al. (2017) also stated that requirements of library services within the class and academic support assist students in evolving skills that directly influence academic achievement. Given the increased academic achievement based on academic support and resources, institutional policy establishing these services is imperative.

Implementation of Academic Support and Resources

Based on the academic support and resources that provide a direct increase to academic achievement amongst students, institutions are also responsible for implementing academic support and resources based on student needs and challenges. As Dreyer (2017) explained that during implementation there must not be a gap in the policy of academic support and resources as this will cause contextual differences and not assist with quality efforts. Likewise, institutions must identify challenges and pursue academic support where needed, including the use of institutional research and data, to ensure students are given proper academic support and resources (Njenga et al., 2017). In addition, Patterson and Wickstrom (2017) described that institutions must continue to acknowledge challenges and implement actions, such as academic support and resources, but must carefully integrate strategy to identify strengths, weaknesses, and collective learning contributions. But, the introduction of academic support and resources must be aligned with the policy in which the institution and community can successfully lead and manager to assist students (White, 2018). And, institutions must further understand each students' learning process to better implement policies and academic support and resources to challenge and provide growth in higher education (Campbell, Dortch, & Burt, 2018). While institutions are responsible for implementing academic support and resources to assist with student needs and challenges, they must do so with a clear understanding of what and how to add such needs.

Conclusion

The lack of understanding regarding the effect of participation in veteran student support services have on veteran students' academic achievement was the focus of this study. The goal was to produce a policy paper to suggest recommendations that would improve the overall academic support and resources available to veteran students at higher education institutions. The implementation of such academic support and resources will be championed by higher education professionals, including administrators, faculty, and staff, who identify a need for additional assistance for these students. The data derived for this research revealed that there was no statistically significant difference among student who did or did not participate in veteran student support services at two higher education institutions in the state of Maryland. Therefore, additional academic support and resources with proven academic achievement influence need to be added to assist this student population.

Reflection

Lack of research regarding the effects of veteran student support services on academic achievement prompted the evaluation of such academic support and resources to veteran students. A quantitative research study design was conducted to examine the local problem of the effect of participation in veteran student support services have on veteran students' academic achievement. Two Maryland institutions provided archived data to be organized and analyzed to present the findings from the research.

The important policy recommendations must be understood by all internal and external stakeholders. Institutional leadership must be committed to understanding the barriers in veteran students' education and experience prior to accepting to implement

such efforts. There must also be a commitment from administrators, faculty, and staff to improve academic support and resources as they relate to veteran student support services like higher education institutions. Policy recommendations and future research on this problem should address what specific academic support and resources benefit veteran students as they participate in veteran student support services.

In summary, this literature review included studies that showed the impact of higher education policy and how it is designed to enable academic growth and achievement amongst varying student population at higher education institutions. Next, I provided studies that described how best practices are formulated when making policy recommendations at the higher education level. Meanwhile, other studies were reviewed that showed how the implementation of recommendations occur when a change in policy is needed at a higher education institution. This was followed up by the evaluation of studies that detail the need for academic support and resources amongst higher education institutions. And, lastly, I reviewed studies that described how academic support and resources were created or added to the existing policy to assist with student challenges and provide solutions.

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